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# ORGANIZED PREACHING. III

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In the two preceding sections of this study the general principles underlying the subject have been set forth and the occasions calling for particular sermons have been passed in review. We now begin the survey of the remaining Sundays with a view to organizing the year's sermons around one dominant subject. One of these will be passed in review in each of the articles that will conclude the study.

## **Preaching Organized According to the Life and Teachings of Jesus**

If there is any one major subject on which it is a joy to preach it is the life and teachings of Jesus. Every minister is a student of the gospel story and of those messages of life and power that are transforming the world.

The first element of charm is the beauty of the human life of the Master and the way in which this lends itself to presentation in public address. The simple naturalness of his association with all sorts and conditions of men renders the gospel eminently preachable. The human values are so evident on the surface of the story and every incident is so charged with meaning for all time that the preacher finds the Gospels running over with texts and subjects suited to all the practical situations that he meets in his parish.

Again, the nobility of the teachings themselves, combined with their fitness to all times and conditions, make it easy to preach in this field. There is

no practical situation that will confront the preacher for which some workable principle may not be found in some of the recorded words of the Master. Of course he did not live in a factory town and the present industrial problems were not a part of that world in which he lived; but it is amazing to see how snugly the teaching fits every problem of the present day, not with detailed rules but with general principles, "snug as an old shoe." So the preacher will never fail to find material for his task in the teachings of Jesus.

In using this material it is of prime importance that we use our imagination to objectify and personalize the material in the Gospels, so that we shall be certain that these men and women whom Jesus loved and helped were real human beings, living in a far-off land and in a distant age, but loving, suffering, and struggling as we do. There is danger in thinking of the Bible characters and teachings in such a way that we shall de-humanize them and make them either impossible ideals or vague abstractions. As a matter of fact they are neither, but flesh-and-blood people, wonderfully like ourselves in their essential characteristics and meeting in general the problems of life as we meet them.

As we imagine these real persons with whom Jesus dealt we must also picture actual situations in which they were found and where they worked out the solution of their problems, as we

must work ours out. Take this man Nicodemus. He was face to face with a serious problem. He was doing actual thinking. He was seeking a truth that was of vital moment to him. When he came to Jesus at night it was no bodiless ghost that crept up the stairs to the room on the roof where the Rabbi from Nazareth was resting; it was a true man, with a beating heart and a yearning spirit, who had a problem to be solved. And the only way in which to preach on the meaning of the great conversation that followed is to make these facts clear in our minds by the use of our imagination so that we shall see them clearly. Then the whole scene becomes vivid and we sense the thrill of the moment when Jesus tells Nicodemus the full meaning of a life that has been quickened from above.

In handling this material through the use of the imagination we must not fail to treat it reverently. There is a sense in which we must put off our shoes because we stand here on holy ground. These narratives are something more than bits of dramatic literature. They are the revelation of truth that sets men free; these reports are concerned with the divinest events in all history. There is greater temptation to treat the material lightly when we are trying to portray a historical situation than when we are presenting one of the profounder teachings of Jesus. In both events, however, we must keep within the bounds of reverent regard for the material that we are using.

We must remember also that what we have to use is not biographies or systematic arrangements of truth, but outline character sketches and brief

statements of general truths. Probably we would not know the character of Jesus any better if we had a biography of him in four folio volumes; but the amount of material available for our use would be much more and consequently we would have more freedom in its treatment. Also if the teaching packed into the "Sermon on the Mount," which is hardly a sermon at all, had been set forth in detailed treatment in a textbook in religion and ethics we would have been given a far wider field in which we might have exercised with greater safety and joy. As it is we have only outline sketches and brief summaries with which to deal.

The method in handling such subjects must be expository; that is, the actual meaning of the scene or the message must be sought first of all. Then it must be presented in a concrete and graphic style. Men are interested in something that touches their own world and comes from the experiences of living men and women. If the life and teaching of Jesus is not thus given direct bearing upon specific phases of present-day life it will miss its purpose. Therefore the passages of considerable length that are chosen for treatment must be filled with a content that is relevant to the interests and problems of the modern man.

In preparing for the year's preaching on the life and teachings of Jesus we suggest that the plan be decided upon in the spring and that the purpose be kept constantly in mind during the summer. Beginning with September 1 make a calendar of Sundays for the year, noting the occasions and writing in the subjects that are to be taken up

Sunday by Sunday in following the general plan. This will necessarily be varied according to necessity; but it is assuring to have the year's pulpit work down in black and white as a guide and encouragement. Then make such changes as are necessary during the progress of the months, and never let the schedule become a fetter to freedom in preaching.

The first step in preparation is to review and renew your acquaintance with the life and teachings of Jesus. Every preacher is familiar with these, and yet this very familiarity sometimes makes the material vague and ineffective. Therefore review the Gospels with the purpose in mind to get a fresh and complete prospect of the outstanding events and the great teachings in mind as a whole. It is a sound principle that a survey of the whole should precede a knowledge of the parts of any subject.

In reading the Gospels begin with Mark if a single narrative is to be taken. Another excellent way to gain a fresh glimpse of the content of the Four Gospels is to use a Harmony. The American Standard Version is used in Kerr, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (American Tract Society). Read the Gospels themselves before turning to a Life of Christ or a book on his teachings. The New Testament is the most satisfactory source in the end. After this has been used thoroughly it is time to turn to the biographies. In getting at the material in the Gospels Weymouth's version is most valuable. Many times a fresh meaning will flash from one of these translations into modern English.

Studies in the life and teachings of Jesus are so many that it is difficult to

select one or two for especial commendation for use in preparing this season's sermons. Probably the most satisfactory book on the teachings is Wendt, *The Teaching of Jesus*, in two volumes. We also mention two lives of Christ: Sanday, *Outlines of the Life of Christ*; and David Smith, *In the Days of His Flesh*. There are scores of other volumes available; but a large library is not needed. The best tools for this study are still the Gospels, read and studied with painstaking care, in Greek if that is possible, but with a Bible dictionary and one or two modern commentaries at hand. The worth of the sermons will depend upon the work done upon them; and the preacher who studies and thinks most will get the best results.

The following thirty-two sermon suggestions are based upon passages which are treated in two books, either of which or both will be found valuable in carrying on the studies necessary to the full preparation of the discourses: *Studies in the Life of Jesus Christ* by E. I. Bosworth. (New York: Association Press, 1904.) *Jesus and the Young Man of To-day* by John M. Holmes. (New York: Macmillan, 1919. \$1.00.) The Gospel of Mark is followed in the selections and the events and the teachings are so varied that both are fairly treated during the year's work.

#### 1. In His Father's House

*Know ye not that I must be in my Father's house? (Luke 2:49).*

This is the first glimpse of Jesus as a boy that is given us in the records. He was a village lad, going up to the great city for the grand festival. He did not go to the bazaars; he went to talk with the great men.

Jesus was listening. He would not have rushed to the movies; he wanted to hear the best-known teachers talk about the subjects that Mary had told him about. Truth by which to live was more to him than trade or a show.

Jesus was learning. There were many ways to learn; for him there was one place where he could find out what he wanted most to know. So he went to the Temple to talk with the wise men. He wanted the great truths on which the soul lives.

Jesus was at home with divine views of life. He was going to be a carpenter; but also he was going to be the child of a heavenly Father. Therefore he needed to be as much at home with his divine Father's business as he was with the tools of his trade.

## 2. The Voice of the Messenger

Use Mark 1:1-8 in an expository manner to indicate the mission and character of John in order to show how he prepared the way for the work of Jesus. Three aspects of his mission appear:

The Maker of the Master's Highway. Study Isa. 40:3. Note the figure of a king making a royal progress through his realm. The way was prepared for him. How did John perform a similar service for Jesus?

The Preacher of Righteousness. John gave an intense and personal moral message. Men faced their sins and forsook them under the stress of the message. Christ could not come and be at home in a social order where sin was regnant.

The Herald of the Mightier One. John's work was not an end in itself. He merged his own interests in those of Christ, as the stars fade in the light of the rising sun.

As makers of the way for Christ, what does this suggest concerning the life and work of all Christians now?

## 3. Days of Test and Decision

*And straightway the Spirit driveth him forth into the wilderness. And he was in the*

*wilderness forty days tempted of Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him* (Mark 1:12, 13).

Use Matt. 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13 for the details, noting the difference in the order of the tests.

*The stones made into bread.*—This is the test of the physical and material. Shall life be lived on a physical plane? The Roman emperors were relying on "bread and shows" to hold the allegiance of the people. Jesus made the spiritual supreme and would not subvert it to the material.

*The pinnacle of the Temple.*—The test of religious leadership. Jesus was a religious genius. This was a real test. But it was local and it was based on mere working of miracles.

*World-dominion.*—Jesus was a young man. He was intensely patriotic. He knew the ideals of the time and the passion for freedom from Roman tyranny. Would he mobilize Israel against Rome and become a political Emancipator? He was to be the Founder of a spiritual Kingdom. He kept himself for his supreme task.

## 4. Prayer and Action in Galilee

Use Mark 1:32-39 to present the first vivid picture of Jesus as he begins his public work. The following chief factors appear:

*Beneficent action.*—Jesus brought some blessing, some enrichment of life to everyone with whom he came in contact. He favored no particular group. He suited his gift to the needs of men. But from physical healing to the quickening of the spirit Jesus blessed people.

*Persistent prayer.*—He left the tumult of the crowd for the peace and power that are found in the place and practice of prayer. He had his seasons for prayer; his whole life was carried on in the spirit of prayer. Power came from this.

*Missionary passion.*—Note verse 38. The needs of the next towns claimed his life and labor. He felt the pull of human need and the urge of his mission. He could not

be content until he had brought his message and power to all men.

### 5. Sin and Sickness

Use Mark 2:1-12 with expository method to give a picture of a typical case of physical healing involving the needs of both the body and the soul.

*Forgiveness of sin.*—The determined effort of the friends of the sick man to get him into contact with Jesus is noteworthy. Jesus went to the root of the matter; he pronounced the man's sins forgiven. There had been a cause for the paralysis. It lay in the breaking of a law of God, which is the essential fact in sin. Jesus overcame the evil result by removing the sinful cause. He always went to the root of things.

*The cure of disease.*—Jesus met the physical wants of men as well as their spiritual needs. This explains his popular appeal, but not his enduring power. If he had been nothing more than a physical healer we never would have known him as Savior from sin. He met men on the level of their human needs and lifted them to health, hope, and joy. He did this by going to the very root of their material difficulties and removing the spiritual causes of their physical woes. Jesus is the great Physician of bodies and souls.

### 6. In His House by the Side of the Road

*They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners* (Mark 2:17).

The title is taken from the familiar poem by Sam Walter Foss, beginning, "Let me live in my house by the side of the road." Show how Jesus was the one real Friend of man by a vivid contrast.

The Pharisees were first and only for themselves. They were busy about salvation; but it was for themselves and their friends. Thus they put their own interests, party, and program into the supreme place and pushed these interests without regard for others.

Jesus was first and forever for others. He made his life a mission of help and hope to his comrades. He said that the person who would keep his life for himself would lose it in the end. He gave his life for the world and he is the greatest of all living forces today. His teaching and example furnish the marching orders of the Christian.

### 7. The Great Teacher

*Who hath ears to hear, let him hear* (Mark 4:9).

The place of teaching in the impression and spread of truth. The following characteristics of the teaching of Jesus:

*Its clearness and beauty.*—No jargon which only the initiated can understand. So plain that a child knows its meaning and so beautiful that it calls for the admiration and respect of the oldest.

*Its depth and range.*—In spite of its simplicity it plumbs the depths of human life. It is radical, in that it goes to the very roots of all thought and life. It is inclusive of all human duties and relations.

*Its practical character.*—The teaching is adapted to men and women living now on this earth. It is concerned with the daily conduct of human beings. It is concrete and workable. No one ever has fully lived up to it; if this were done a new world would result.

*Its confirmation by his perfect life.*—Other teachers have expressed noble truths; but their own conduct has fallen short of their teaching. The life of Jesus matched his message in every detail. This fact assures us that we can reach the same level when we act from the same motives.

The importance of listening to such teaching.

### 8. How Shall We Listen?

Use the Parable of the Soils in Mark 4:1-20 to show how the truth is conditioned by the way in which it is heard. There are four types of mind reflected here:

*The hardened mind.*—It is beaten down by commonplace toil and the weight of heavy

burdens. Truth cannot strike root there and the seed is eaten by the birds. Break up the soil.

*The shallow mind.*—It responds quickly to any stimulus but does not continue. No dependence can be placed upon such persons for enduring action. Deepen the soil.

*The preoccupied mind.*—So many interests engross time and strength that the supreme appeal is crowded out. Simplify.

*The fertile mind.*—This is the larger part of the field. Truth finds root; grows steadily; comes to fruition quickly. The harvest blesses others. Extend the areas of fertility.

Impress the lesson: *Take heed how ye hear.*

#### 9. Life in a Touch

*For she said, If I touch but his garments, I shall be made whole* (Mark 5:28).

Note the margin, *saved*. Through faith in Christ even the slightest contact brings a new life. Our supreme need is to be in living relations with Christ.

*The Master's power.*—Christ can cleanse the springs of moral motive and spiritual desire so that we are saved from the clutch and pollution of old sin. There is in him an actual energy of redemption. His gift is new life.

*The humility of true faith.*—The woman was satisfied to be unknown. She did not seek publicity. She did not ask that the contact should bring her reputation rather than relief. Her faith was voluntary and effective. It was an act of personal trust that issued in a new life within her.

*The instant response of divine sympathy.*—Christ never kept anyone waiting as a suppliant. He had no office hours and private secretaries. Those who needed him were the ones whom he needed. He was swift and mighty in help. One touch was enough. Christ waits to bless us.

#### 10. The Bread of Life

*Give ye them to eat* (Mark 6:37).

Use the story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand in Mark 6:30-44 to show

how Christ still meets the needs of humanity through the ministry of their comrades.

*Responsibility.*—Jesus created a sense of personal responsibility for the people on the part of the disciples. This burden was necessary before they would act generously.

*Inventory.*—He made the disciples survey their resources in order to meet their obligations. Nothing could be done intelligently or effectively without surveying the resources available. The inventory was a means to an end.

*Organization.*—The people were grouped in order that they might be handled with economy. Impossible to do good work without wise and constant planning. But the program is only the means to an end.

*Consecration.*—The resources at hand for the great task were brought to God and devoted to the need of the people.

*Satisfaction.*—The people had enough to meet their needs. When our utmost resources are economically used by God's help they meet the situation.

*Conservation.*—Nothing was wasted. The loaves and fishes are essential; but so are the crumbs.

#### 11. Jesus the Radical

*For from within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed* (Mark 7:21).

The teaching of Jesus goes to the very root of conduct and life. This makes it radical. Inward motives and external acts were united by him in their true relation.

Jesus lodged moral values in the ruling motives of life. Those purposes which guide us habitually are supremely important. Jesus laid all the emphasis of his teaching upon these. This may be seen especially in Matt. 5:21-48.

Jesus proposed the highest moral standard for his followers. It surpassed that of the Pharisees. Men are to be holy as God is holy. No one can follow Christ without being changed in moral character. Christ creates the Christian character, which is different from that of the un-Christian

person. This is a fair test of discipleship: Are we like Christ in the dominant purposes of our daily living?

Jesus provides moral resources or power to match the new motives which he provides. Christ gives us resident energy which enables us to achieve that which he proposes we should become. His values, his standards, and his resources all go to the root of life.

#### 12. The Great Confession

*Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ (Mark 8:29).*

The text comes from a critical moment in the life of Jesus. What men thought about him was a decisive matter. Our actions are finally determined by our convictions.

The Christ was the Savior and Lord for whom the people were waiting and who would be their leader into a new life. That is what the Christ is still.

What do men say about him? As then so now there are many conflicting judgments. These range all the way from the denial of his historical reality to the ascription of the name of God to him. He is the most criticized and the most adored of all men who ever have lived.

What does Christian experience say about him? For two thousand years almost there has been a growing body of testimony from those who claim that they have certain facts in their personal experience that warrant their claim that Jesus is still the Christ, the Creator of a new life for society and for the individual.

What do you say about him? This is the urgent question. As he becomes your Master and Lord you will give him an ever-growing place of honor in your thought and loyalty. But it is more important to have a living experience of Christ than a theory concerning him.

#### 13. Christ's Estimate of Values

*If any man would be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all (Mark 9:35).*

The disciples were disputing with one another as to who should be first in the Kingdom of God. They were estimating values by the ordinary human standards. Christ gave them a new scale of values.

Jesus does not deny that it is right to want to be first. There is abundant room for leadership in the Kingdom and ambition is a worthy motive. But Christ offers new standards of pre-eminence.

The way to be first is to be ready to be last. Christ's followers must not seek the first place merely for the sake of being first.

The sure road to the first place is the readiness to render service. Not where we stand but what we do is important. Personal ambition therefore receives a new meaning. It is the great desire to give our best rather than to gain most. It puts the love and service of men above all selfish ends.

#### 14. Transfigured

*Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah (Mark 9:5).*

Set forth the supremacy of Jesus over the great figures that dominate religion.

Christ is greater than Moses, representing the law. The old law represented the will or purpose of God for man coming into expression through concrete command which it was the glory of man to obey. It produced an exact and upright life, full of honorable severity. Christ is the indwelling Master, whose service is perfect freedom. We do not conform to outward standards but we are conformed to his spirit within us.

Christ is greater than Elijah, representing the prophets. God came to man through the words and deeds of men in the great seers. It is a higher type of religion than the legal and ceremonial. Christ was not only the greatest of the prophets, but he comes into the very hearts of those who love and serve him.



Thus Christ is radiant and glorified in his perfect character, in his ceaseless love, and in his divine sacrifice. We build the temple for him in our grateful hearts.

#### 15. The Children's Friend

*And he took them in his arms, and blessed them, laying his hands upon them* (Mark 10:16).

*What kind of a man likes children?*—One who has not forgotten his own childhood. Hard to keep a vivid sense of this under the pressure of adult life.

One who has the imagination to detach himself sufficiently from his own world so that he can enter into the world of childhood.

One who believes in humanity with all his soul and to whom therefore all human interests are dear.

*What kind of a man do children like?*—One who is simply and naturally himself and does not patronize or ignore them.

One who is sympathetic and patient so that he can take a real place in the life of the child.

One who loves sincerely and constantly and does not use any kind of make-believe in his interest for the real world where children live.

Jesus was this kind of a man, as is shown by the way in which the children came to him and trusted him. This one fact reveals all the chief qualities of mind and heart in the Master.

#### 16. Challenging Young Manhood

*Go, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me* (Mark 10:21).

This young man was like Francis of Assisi before he determined to follow Christ: a soul in which there was no altar. The command of Jesus is to be studied in two aspects.

*Negative.*—A surrender of the false grounds of satisfaction in order to make ready for the greater good. His possessions

were really the enemies of his spirit in the way in which he was holding them. He needed to learn the joy of helping others rather than holding on to his wealth.

*Positive.*—This is the more important part of the command. The young man was called to have a permanent instead of a perishing treasure. Jesus wanted him to give an immortal content to his life. It need not end with death. It could take on eternal significance and last forever in the blessed service that he would render. Then he called him into a personal fellowship with himself. The young man might have been known forever as a comrade of Christ. He might have written a gospel. He might have been a reporter of the deathless words of Christ. Jesus called him to deathless fame and he preferred dollars.

#### 17. The Master's Mission

*For the Son of man came also not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many* (Mark 10:45).

The key to the interpretation of a person's life is to understand the great motives that rule him habitually. The Master's purpose is disclosed here in two aspects.

*Negative.*—Not to be served. Men want to be comfortable, to have things done for them. They regard life as a hotel and are constantly criticizing the "service." So they seek to command so many resources that they may be well taken care of by their generation.

*Positive.*—Against this idea Jesus set his purpose and that of his followers. Christians are to help. Everywhere the need is apparent. Men are fighting battles and bearing burdens. Love and kindness are needed more than physical gifts. The hand that helps is the hand that blesses the age.

Christians must sacrifice. Nothing less than life itself is involved in the gift which Christians must make to their world. The

upward path of humanity is red with the sacrifice of those who have made the advance possible. We never do our most and best for our time until we give our very selves. The supreme service cannot be purchased or delegated.

#### 18. The Reformer

*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations; but ye have made it a den of robbers* (Mark 11:17).

Jesus appears here as a reformer of the evil customs of his time. This is a permanent factor in the gospel. It challenges the sin of the world with its inexorable demand.

*The invasion of evil.*—Selfishness and graft are constantly invading the premises of religion. Drive them out by one door and they come in by another. There is ceaseless warfare between the cause of Christ and the arrogant and intrenched sin of the world.

*The house of prayer.*—There is only one place in which all the races of the world can be united; it is the place of prayer. We are divided by definitions; we are united in the praise and prayer of religion and in the practical programs of service that spring out of them. We cannot quarrel when we sing and pray together.

*The pain of purgation.*—Nothing finally avails except the expulsion of the evil; this costs a great price. Life has to be spent in the purgation of sin. The community fights us when we attack its daring sins. But it must be done. The disciples of Christ are the champions of goodness in its warfare with evil.

#### 19. The Conqueror

*Hosanna in the Highest* (Mark 11:10).

Jesus appears as Victor and King on Palm Sunday. His conquest and coronation are not in the political and material realms, as the people thought; but he is Conqueror in the kingdom of the spirit.

*Victor in the realm of imperial thinking.*—Jesus was not a scientist or philosopher;

but he is the one great Master in teaching us how to live. This is the highest thinking.

*Conqueror of all coarseness.*—Fine things flourished in his presence. Coarse and ugly things were rebuked and retreated. Jesus loved the beautiful in nature and in the moral and spiritual life and brought them into being and action. In time he will conquer the ugly everywhere.

*Conqueror of sin.*—The supreme agent of destruction in the world is sin. One who can show us how to conquer sin becomes the supreme benefactor of the race. Jesus brings this knowledge and power into our lives.

*Conqueror of the fear of death.*—This has always haunted men. The weakest have cringed before it. The strongest have felt that their work must finally be dropped and the end of mortal life must come. Jesus conquered this finally and forever. He proved that death is an episode in life and not the end of it.

#### 20. The Last Appeal

*He had yet one, a beloved son: he sent him last unto them saying, They will reverence my son* (Mark 12:6).

God's final and most convincing appeal to men is through Jesus, the Father's supreme gift to the world.

The appeal of moral law and discipline has been made. We know enough about the right, but we do not win our way back to the lost loyalty by this means.

Great leaders, like the prophets, arise. They speak burning words and inflame a passing zeal. But their voices fade and their power wanes. The human leader is not able to hold his command to the end.

The discipline of life, like the captivity of the Jews, brings the truth home to the spirit for a time, but is soon forgotten. Warnings are regarded for a time; but the power is temporary.

Christ brings the supreme and last appeal from God to men. He is the perfect man. All loveliness is in him. He is

the complete expression of the love and will of God. This commands our honor and loyalty. He laid down his life to show us how to live. This evokes our gratitude and fires our practical desire to love and follow him. He can do for us more than any other Master. To resist his appeal is to fail in response to the most persuasive force in the world.

#### 21. Caesar's Due

*Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's* (Mark 12:17).

There is no conflict between the claims of the state and those of religion in the teachings of Jesus. The problem is one of definition of obligation.

*What is due to Caesar?*—This represents the state or the political organism. To it is due material support. Taxes are a Christian obligation. Also intelligent thought must be given to the commonwealth. Christians ought to be leaders in thinking through the problems of the state. Also personal service is due. Public office ought not to be sought as a selfish aim but accepted as a holy trust. The Christian in politics does not flee from civic problems but accepts them as a claim on his personal service.

*What is due to God?*—The same obligation that is due to the state. First, such stewardship of all resources given us by God as will promote his Kingdom on earth. Money and time and personality must be given to God. Also a more intelligent consideration of religion is demanded. We do not think enough about God. Also personal service to Christ and the Kingdom of God is required. We cannot be Christians unless we devote ourselves in all the range of our powers to God.

#### 22. The Supreme Commandment

*The first is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God, the Lord is one: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all*

*thy strength. The second is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself* (Mark 12:29-31).

The simple law had become complex and burdensome from the traditions and discussions of the scribes. Jesus set it forth with clearness and simplicity.

*Love God with your whole being.*—This involves thought and love and action. Religion is in ceaseless danger of becoming superficial and fragmentary. Christ calls for every organ, every power, all our personality to be yielded in complete love to God the Father. This idea of the completeness of religion rebukes all partial expressions of it in creed or ceremony and makes it vital and potent.

*Love others as you love yourself.*—How do we love ourselves? We often abuse ourselves as we would not abuse others. Is the law right? But true self-love seeks to preserve every power of our being at its highest, knowing the obligation to serve which rests upon us. We seek our own highest good because this promotes the highest good of the community. This furnishes the law for the treatment of others. They are necessary to us as we are necessary to them.

#### 23. Our Noblest Guest

*And he will himself show you a large upper room furnished and ready; and there make ready for us* (Mark 14:15).

Jesus lived in the closest fellowship with his friends. In this critical hour he needed them and they needed him. The place in which the Last Supper was eaten stands for the fellowship of all Christians with their Master.

It must be a large and high room in which we receive our noblest guest. This means love without limit or reserves; large thoughts and ample reverences; full of lofty ideals of love, truth, and duty. Elevation of purpose must mark the life where Christ dwells.

It must be furnished and ready. The equipment of the spirit united in fellowship

with the Master calls for all the best powers not only to be present but to be ready for the most devoted use to which they may be put for Christ. Readiness means order and adaptation to use.

This large furnished room must be ready for the Master. There may be many callers, some transient residents, but the only permanent guest must be Christ. When we enlarge, equip, and order our lives to make ready for him he brings joy, peace, and power as he takes up his residence in the closest fellowship with us.

#### 24. In Remembrance of Him

*Take ye: this is my body* (Mark 14:22).

The Christian people have observed the Last Supper of Jesus in many forms as a sacrament or memorial service. Our theory concerning the sacrament may vary; but the fact of remembrance underlies all commemoration of the event. What do we remember concerning our Lord in the celebration of the communion?

*His perfect human life.*—It was a wonderful physical body, unbroken by a sin and unscarred by a vice. His mind was alert and never harbored a coarse thought. He loved and sympathized without partiality.

*His constant, loving, helpful service.*—He touched every comrade with a blessing. No human need was too slight to call out his ministry.

*His ideals for us.*—A friend is tested by what he desires his comrades to become. Jesus called out their best in every friend. When we recall what he would have us be we are stimulated to nobler living.

*His redemptive death.*—By the perfect life and the death at Calvary, Jesus revealed the heart of God and in some way made it possible for us to enter into a new life. The fact is attested by millions of witnesses. Jesus is the Redeemer.

#### 25. Midnight in the Garden

*Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; remove this cup from me: howbeit not what I will, but what thou wilt* (Mark 14:36).

*The reality of Jesus' suffering.*—This was no piece of stage action. The spirit of Jesus went through the deepest human anguish in Gethsemane. This is the struggle of a soul facing the hardest experience of mortal life.

*The perfect faith.*—Jesus believed the Father's love so surely that he could trust it absolutely. He would not have prayed with such perfect trust if he had not been completely sure of the Father's love and power.

*The petition for release.*—Jesus prayed with perfect honesty of spirit that he might be released from the coming death. His prayer was not answered; but his petition was specific and earnest.

*The complete resignation.*—Here Jesus rises to the supreme majesty of faith. He has prayed for release; he is sure that God could release him; but he is ready to subject his whole life to the will of God and experience whatever the divine wisdom and love shall decide to be best. He knows that all human joy and peace rest in accepting the will of God. We know now that the coming death was the greatest service that Jesus could render to humanity. It was God's final word to men. Jesus spoke it.

#### 26. In the Hands of His Enemies

*And they laid hands on him, and took him* (Mark 14:46).

The hostile forces that had organized to end the physical life of Jesus gathered for their deadly business. They represent certain forces that have been seeking to destroy Christ always.

Tradition, formalism, and greed were represented by these foes of Jesus. His rebuke had stung them to fury. His proposal of a new kingdom of love had only increased their enmity.

Sin in all its grosser forms was arrayed against Jesus. His message brought a moral demand that aroused the bitterest hostility of those who were the champions of every or any form of sin. There is no room in the moral universe for Christ and

sin; finally Christ must conquer; but sin will fight to the end.

Doubt and denial were represented in the arrest of Jesus. In order to experience the salvation that Christ brings we must yield to his imperial claim upon our motives and acts. This is impossible unless we trust him. To deny his claim and doubt his power cuts the roots of faith and makes the new life impossible.

Christ is arrested but his spirit cannot be destroyed by these various enemies.

#### 27. False Witnesses

*And not even so did their witness agree together* (Mark 14:59).

*The discord of false testimony concerning Christ.*—The enemies of Jesus had planned the perjury of their witnesses. The liars had been instructed and rehearsed. But not even with this planning was their testimony consistent. It is always so. The enemies of Jesus are not able to put up a case against him.

*The perversion of truth.*—Jesus had spoken of the destruction of the Temple; but he did not mean what his accusers pervert his words to mean in Mark 14:58. His statement might be twisted until it bore this meaning; but it was wicked perversion of truth. This is still common practice. The foes of Christ put meanings to his words that they cannot bear. The way to meet this is to insist upon the simple and accurate statement of what Jesus did really say and do.

*The affirmation of falsehood.*—This is seen in Matt. 26:58; an out and out lie. Easier to combat than subtle perversions of truth. An open untruth has at least the advantage of being specific and admits of contradiction. Christ is still falsely spoken against in countless ways.

*The Master's method.*—Jesus did not fight these false charges. He let them break under their own weight of evil. In the end Christ's claims win because they are true.

#### 28. Christ before Pilate

*And Pilate asked him, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answering saith unto him, Thou sayest* (Mark 12:2).

The scene has been painted. Use the imagination to set it forth clearly and briefly.

*What did Pilate mean by his question?*—A kingdom that was organized on the basis of physical force, as all political kingdoms were. Therefore a kingdom that would finally reject the power of Rome through bloody war. A kingdom of courts and intrigue and selfishness. A king who would rival himself in selfishness and cunning and cruelty. A man whom he must trap or fight to the death. Another Caesar to be revered outwardly but feared and hated inwardly.

*What did Jesus mean by his answer?*—A kingdom of spiritual facts and forces. The reign of love, peace, and goodness. The achievement of the highest welfare of mankind through good will and sacrificial service.

A king in the realm of the spirit. The gentle commander of all benevolent and saving forces in the life of the individual and society. A king who would be ready to sacrifice his own life for the good of the members of the kingdom. A kingdom that would endure when the material universe was ended and all kingdoms erected on force had ceased to be.

#### 29. Calvary

*He saved others; himself he cannot save* (Mark 15:31).

Observe the honor involved in what seemed at the moment a statement of weakness and defeat. Christ is conquering the world simply because he is saving others and did not save himself.

*He saved others.*—This he did while he lived with men. He touched every human life with saving power. He lifted Peter from weakness into strength; restored Mary; transformed Zacchaeus; made sick

men well and hopeless men happy. He saves others now—William Booth and Dwight Moody and every Christian.

*He gave himself.*—He did this while he lived with men. The one force that Jesus never hoarded was his own personality. He gave all he had, his time and strength and love. Finally he yielded up his life when he knew that nothing less would prove the power of God's love. He gives himself now. He comes with invisible, saving strength into the struggles of men and gives them new energy for their daily life.

*He saves others by giving himself.*—Redemption always comes through sacrificial love. This is the eternal principle of the Cross. Jesus takes this fundamental law and uses it for the world's redemption. This process is going on through the whole world today.

In preparing this sermon a quotation might be made from this poem:

"The eyes of man's anguish went up unto  
God,  
'Lord, take away pain;  
The shadow that darkens the world thou  
hast made;  
The close coiling chain that strangles the  
heart;  
The burden that weighs on the wings that  
would soar;  
Lord, take away pain from the world Thou  
hast made,  
That it love Thee the more.'

"Then answered the Lord to the cry of  
the world.  
'Shall I take away pain,  
And with it the power of the Soul to endure,  
Made strong by the strain?  
Shall I take away pity, that knits heart to  
heart,  
And sacrifice high?  
Will ye lose all the heroes that lift from the  
fire  
White hands to the sky?

Shall I take away love that redeems with  
a price

And smiles at the loss?

Can ye spare from your lives, that would  
climb into mine,

The Christ on the Cross?' "

### 30. Living Forevermore

*Be not amazed: ye seek Jesus, the Nazarene, who had been crucified; he is not here: behold, the place where they laid him!* (Mark 16:5).

The reality of the resurrection of Jesus underlies the Christian message and experience. The crucifixion and death of Jesus the Nazarene was a fact that admitted of no doubt. It brought dismay to the hearts of his disciples and scattered them in despair.

Then something that restored their faith and sent them out to preach it to the ends of the earth took place. They said that their dead Master was living again. They were sure that in some way his immortal spirit had reanimated his body so that they saw and knew him. This was not a legend that took shape in later years; it was a fact that had power to create a new world for these men and women who, like ourselves, would not have acted in a wholly different way without a good reason for it.

So the Christ lives again and his resurrection warrants all the claims that he made for himself and that have been made for him. This is essential to the gospel and to the experience of all living Christians. We do not believe a creed, worship in certain ways, follow definite ethical laws alone; we live in constant relations with a living although invisible Master and Lord.

### 31. The Great Commission

*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation* (Mark 16:15).

This is generally known as the Great Commission of the Christian people. It is the marching orders of the comrades of Christ.

*The message.*—It is technically known as the gospel. It is the good news of a new life of joy, peace, and power made possible to everyone who will accept and follow Christ as Savior and Lord. Christ creates new motives and energies in the soul. He is the indwelling and the living Master in union with whom life is changed from sin to goodness.

*The field.*—Study the words “the whole creation.” This means the total life of the world. It begins with nature and it ends with the highest forms of Christian experience. The gospel is inclusive of everything that God has made. It is not shut up to a group of saved or elect souls; it is for the whole world. It imparts new meaning to nature. It gives new worth to all animals. It includes and sanctifies every possible human relationship. It is meant finally to gather up all the universe in a new glory and beauty. This is the splendor and the power of the gospel by which we are saved and which it is our supreme privilege to make known.

### 32. Glorified

*So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken unto them, was received up into heaven, and*

*sat down at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19).*

Other religions have great conceptions of God, beautiful forms of worship, high ethical standards. But no other has such a conception of the living and glorified Savior. Christ is the exalted Lord of the Christian.

“At God’s right hand” means living in closest relations with the Father God. It involves ceaseless fellowship. The Father and Christ are one eternally.

*Intimate sharing of purpose.*—The living Christ knows the purpose of the Father. They have no secrets from each other. The lonely Master who prayed in Gethsemane that he might do the Father’s will now knows what that will is and finds it good.

A “right hand man” is one who not only knows the will of another but also carries it out. Christ is the executive of the perfect will of God. He comes into intimate fellowship also with those who yield to his claim and share his purpose, thus uniting them with God. Christ glorified is the Master of the Christian’s love and life.